

1/27/69

State Dept. review completed

BIAFRA - RELIEF

Question: Reports continue of mounting starvation in the Nigerian Civil War. The Congress now has a concurrent resolution urging more U. S. relief. What does your Administration intend to do about the problem?

Answer: First, I want to make clear my own very deep concern over the human tragedy in this situation. We have no wish to become involved in the politics of the civil war, nor to intrude on any nation's sovereignty. But the sheer enormity of the catastrophe must move the conscience of all mankind and compel extraordinary action.

The watchword of our policy will be compassion. Our first concern is to do all we can, as fast as we can, to help save the lives and relieve the suffering of innocent civilians on both sides. We will expect others, who have the means, to give generously to the relief effort. And most important, we will expect the parties to the conflict to help us help their own people with the same urgency and overriding compassion.

As we announced last Friday, I have ordered a comprehensive review of the relief problem, aimed at urgent recommendations on how best to increase and speed the flow of food and medicine where relief is most needed. The United States, publicly and privately, has already contributed millions. We have, within the last few days,

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taken steps to facilitate current relief flights. As you know, Red Cross flights have been halted by a disagreement between the Red Cross and the government of Equatorial Guinea, from whose territory the flights are made. Secretary Rogers had urgent discussion with the Foreign Minister of Equatorial Guinea last week, and we are in consultation with Red Cross officials to encourage a mutually fair agreement to allow speedy resumption of flights.

I expect to have those action recommendations shortly.

We will keep you informed of further steps.

Question: What specific steps have we taken?

Answer: I am not now at liberty to say.